

VZCZCXRO9028

OO RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK  
RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLH RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHNEH RUEHNP RUEHPOD RUEHPW  
RUEHROV RUEHSK RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHTA #0387/01 0630941  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 040941Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY ASTANA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4804  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE 1300  
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0683  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1386  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0375  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFAAA/DIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC 0861  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC 0777  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEHAST/USOFFICE ALMATY 1282

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASTANA 000387

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN  
STATE FOR OES, PHUDAK, NFITE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EPET](#) [SENV](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: U.S. AIR WAR COLLEGE DELEGATION MEETS WITH  
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT

ASTANA 00000387 001.2 OF 003

11. SUMMARY: Three main documents serve as the basis for Kazakhstan's environmental activities and underpin the government's environmental policies, Ministry of Environment official told a visiting U.S. Air War College delegation on March 2. These documents are the Environmental Code, the Concept Document on Ecological Security, and the Concept Documents on the Transition to Sustainable Development (the latter two are presidential decrees). Kazakhstan's parliament ratified the Kyoto Protocol on February 26 and the President is expected to sign it in the coming days. Kazakhstan has implemented a number of large-scale environmental projects, including wetland conservation, biodiversity preservation, and drylands restoration. Kazakhstan has also prepared a draft law on renewable energy. While the Semipalatinsk area (the former Soviet nuclear test site) continues to have serious environmental problems, Kazakhstan has been able to revive part of the North Aral Sea and raise its water level six meters. Kazakhstan wants to organize a five-country water-energy consortium, because the problems of water and energy are interconnected. The new Tax Code has standardized and fixed pollution fees, thereby helping companies better assess their future costs for long-term investment. The five littoral countries bordering the Caspian Sea signed a framework convention to protect the Caspian's environment, even though there is still no final agreement on Caspian demarcation. END SUMMARY.

#### THE LEGAL ENVIRONMENTAL FRAMEWORK

12. The Director of the Ministry of Environmental Protection's Department of Legal Provision and International Cooperation, Alexander Bragin, accompanied by Department of Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development Director Bolat Bekniyaz and Committee of Environmental Regulation and Control Deputy Chairman Yerlan Ospanov, told a visiting U.S. Air War College delegation on March 2 that three documents serve as the basis for Kazakhstan's environmental activities and underpin all of the government's environmental policies: the Environmental Code, the Concept Document on Ecological Security (2004-2015), and the Concept Document on Transition to Sustainable Development (2007-2024). The latter two

are presidential decrees.

13. Bragin said Kazakhstan's Environmental Code is unique in the entire post-Soviet region in that Kazakhstan has presented it to the UN General Assembly and it complies with all EU environmental regulations, as well as with those of most advanced developed countries. He said Kazakhstan's long-term strategic sustainable development plan has 12 broad parameters, including quality of life, longevity, productivity, and the effective use of resources.

#### ACTIVE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

14. Bragin said Kazakhstan actively cooperates with international partners and has ratified 25 of the most important environmental conventions. He noted that Kazakhstan's parliament ratified the Kyoto Protocol on February 26 and said the President is expected to sign it in the coming days. Bragin said Kazakhstan hosted a sustainable development forum on energy in 2008, and announced that in 2010, Kazakhstan will host a conference of ministers of environment from the Asian-Pacific region, and in 2012 it will host a senior-level conference of ministers of environment from the Eurasian region, with the United States and Canada invited to participate.

#### DRYLANDS MANAGEMENT PROJECT

15. Bragin said Kazakhstan has implemented a number of large-scale environmental projects funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), including wetland conservation, biodiversity preservation, and drylands restoration. He explained that the Drylands (Grasslands) Management Project's initial phase, sponsored by the World Bank, was confined to 15,000 hectares in the Shetsky district in South Karaganda oblast. The project's aim is to restore the grasslands to sustainability. The government plans to launch a second phase soon that will cover the whole country. He said most

ASTANA 00000387 002.2 OF 003

of these lands have seriously eroded as a result of the Soviet-era "Virgin Lands" campaign, and in some places have even become desert. The goal now is to restore traditional "no-till" cultivation methods, natural steppe flora, and livestock open range grazing to avoid concentrating livestock in one location that could lead to overgrazing and further land degradation.

#### RENEWABLE ENERGY

16. Bragin said Kazakhstan has also prepared a draft law on renewable energy and President Nazarbayev has asked the government to develop a strategy for a more efficient use of renewable energy. He said Kazakhstan's renewable energy potential is "huge" and noted that in southern Kazakhstan, the total capacity of micro hydro stations is four gigawatts. One of Kazakhstan's goals is to develop sufficient renewable wind and solar energy power and potable water resources to permit the return to nomadic traditions in the steppes. As nomads move with their livestock, they should be able to find readily available renewable energy and potable water to help sustain this traditional lifestyle.

#### SEMPALATINSK REMAINS A DIFFICULT ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM

17. Bragin maintained that there remains a radioactive waste problem in the Semipalatinsk area (the former Soviet nuclear test site, where there were more than 100 above-ground nuclear explosions). Kazakhstan has brought this matter before the United Nations twice, but unfortunately there has been very little international aid. NATO has supported two projects and Great Britain one. Kazakhstan has done most of the rehabilitation work, and has a comprehensive rehabilitation project underway through 2009. It plans a similar follow-on project to run through 2012.

#### NORTH ARAL SEA: SOME RECOVERY, BUT STILL IN DANGER

18. Bragin said that even though Kazakhstan, with the help of the World Bank, has been able to revive part of the north Aral Sea and raise its water level six meters, the Aral Sea is still in jeopardy and the government has decided to raise this issue at the next

session of the UN General Assembly. He mentioned the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) as an organization active in saving the Aral Sea, but in spite of its work and the work of other similar groups, the Aral Sea continues to shrink. He said that unless something dramatic and unforeseen happens, in spite of the efforts of governments in the region, the south and east parts of the Aral Sea will not return to their previous state. Most of the water flowing into the Aral Sea comes from the Syr-Darya River, flowing through Uzbekistan. Currently, he said there is hardly any water reaching the Aral Sea, and unless the regional water management problem is resolved, the problem of the Aral Sea will not be solved. Bragin said Kazakhstan is "doing its best, but other countries are not cooperating." Kazakhstan has been somewhat successful in the north Aral Sea, but has no ability to affect the rest of the Aral Sea. There is currently discussion of creating a five-country water consortium in Central Asia to address this problem, but Bragin said Kazakhstan would prefer to see a water-energy consortium, because the problems of water and energy are interconnected.

#### POLLUTION FEES

¶9. Bragin said that the government has been able to gain more control over the environmental programs of "national resource companies" (e.g., oil and gas companies, mining companies, etc.). He claimed that the Ministry's objective is to reduce resource companies' overall pollution fees. In the past, local governments determined what substances were "pollutants" and how much the pollutant fees were. In many cases, companies were paying for emissions on an unlimited number of substances. The new Tax Code now stipulates which substances are "pollutants" and sets a fixed fee, changeable from year to year. As a result, companies can better assess future costs. Bragin said the bulk of the pollution

ASTANA 00000387 003.2 OF 003

fees go into local government budgets, and only 30 percent goes into the general budget earmarked for environmental projects. As a result, the Ministry of Environment is less concerned about assessing pollution fees and more concerned about properly implemented environmental programs.

#### CASPIAN SEA

¶10. Bragin said the Caspian Sea is one of Central Asia's most serious environmental problems. It has attracted a great deal of attention because this is where most of Central Asia's oil is produced. The five littoral countries (Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan) have signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, calling on the states to protect the Caspian Sea's fragile environment. Unfortunately, he said, the littoral states have not finalized an agreement on the Caspian's demarcation. The Caspian Environmental Program Office, previously located in Tehran, will now move to Astana as part of its regular rotation through the littoral countries.

HOAGLAND